

The Best and Worst Cities for Expats in Central and South America








The annual Expat City Ranking reveals how expats rate life in 82 cities around the world, including seven cities in Central and South America.

- Mexico City (14th) and Panama City (25th) rank ahead of Santiago de Chile (40th), Bogotá (44th), Buenos Aires (56th), São Paulo (62nd), and Lima (75th) in the Expat City Ranking.
- Based on the ranking, Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore, Montréal, Lisbon, Barcelona, Zug, The Hague, and Basel are the best cities to move to in 2020.
- Kuwait City (82nd), Rome, Milan, Lagos (Nigeria), Paris, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Lima, New York City, and Yangon (73rd) are the world's worst cities.

Munich, 3 December 2019 — Seven Central and South American cities are featured in the Expat City Ranking 2019 by [InterNations](#), the world's largest expat community with 3.6 million members. They are distributed over the full ranking, with Mexico City leading and Lima placing last in the region. While most cities rank well in the Finance & Housing Index (aside from São Paulo and Buenos Aires), expats are not too happy with the quality of life. Expats' opinions are mixed in the Urban Work Life Index: Mexico City and Panama City make it in the top 30 worldwide, but Bogotá, São Paulo, Lima, Buenos Aires can be found among the bottom 30.

Expat City Ranking 2019

Expat Life in 7 Central & South American Cities

	 Quality of Urban Living Index	 Getting Settled Index	 Urban Work Life Index	 Finance & Housing Index	 Local Cost of Living Index	 Happiness Level
Bogotá 44th	70th	31st	53rd	11th	15th	79%
Buenos Aires 56th	46th	19th	78th	53rd	47th	79%
Lima 75th	79th	51st	70th	25th	18th	75%
 Mexico City 14th	67th	5th	23rd	6th	6th	88%
Panama City 25th	62nd	41st	27th	5th	42nd	85%
Santiago de Chile 40th	45th	63rd	48th	20th	50th	77%
São Paulo 62nd	75th	35th	61st	40th	51st	74%

The Expat City Ranking 2019 covers 82 cities in total.

The [Expat City Ranking](#) is based on the annual *Expat Insider* survey by InterNations, which is with more than 20,000 respondents in 2019 one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad. In 2019, 82 cities around the globe are analyzed in the survey, offering in-depth information about

five areas of expat life: Quality of Urban Living, Getting Settled, Urban Work Life, Finance & Housing, and Local Cost of Living. Taken together, the first four areas make up the Expat City Ranking, which reveals the best and worst cities to move to in 2020.

What Expats Think about Life in 7 Central & South American Cities

14. Mexico City

Mexico City comes in 14th place in the Expat City Ranking 2019, the best ranked out of all cities surveyed in Central and South America. The Mexican capital even ranks among the top 10 worldwide in the Getting Settled (5th), Finance & Housing (6th), and Local Cost of Living Indices (6th). In terms of getting settled, only Kuala Lumpur (1st), Manama (2nd), Nairobi (3rd), and Muscat (4th) are more popular among expats. Around three in four expats in Mexico City (77%) claim to be happy with their social life (vs. 55% globally), 84% find the locals generally friendly (vs. 64% globally), and 71% find it easy to make friends (vs. 45% globally). A Portuguese expat highlights *"the way people welcome me,"* and adds that *"the weather, the food, and the cost of life"* are highlights of life in Mexico City. In fact, 69% of expats are happy with the local cost of living, compared to 43% globally. Moreover, 69% of expats in Mexico City have a positive view on the local cost of living (vs. 43% globally), and around half (51%) find housing affordable (vs. 36% globally).

Expats' opinions are mixed in the Urban Work Life Index (23rd). They rank Mexico City high in the Work-Life Balance subcategory (18th), but low in the Job Security subcategory (58th). In fact, 22% worry about the local economy (vs. 15% globally). Despite that, the city can be found among the top 5 for overall job satisfaction (4th), just behind the German city of Aachen (1st), Jakarta (2nd), and Ho Chi Minh City (3rd). The Quality of Urban Living Index is Mexico City's worst area, with the city ranking on a low 67th place. While 86% are happy with the local leisure options (vs. 74% globally), over a third of respondents (35%) feel unsafe (vs. 9% globally). *"It is not safe to walk at night alone,"* a British expat points out. What is more, 55% are unhappy with the quality of the environment (vs. 17% globally).

25. Panama City

Coming in 25th in the Expat City Ranking 2019, Panama City ranks fifth worldwide in the Finance & Housing Index, only behind Ho Chi Minh City (1st), Kuala Lumpur (2nd), Bangkok (3rd), and Taipei (4th). More than four in five expats in Panama City (82%) say it is easy to find housing (vs. 50% globally), and almost half (48%) agree it is affordable (vs. 36% globally). What is more, over seven in ten expats (71%) are happy with their financial situation (vs. 57% globally). Interestingly, this is despite the fact that 46% of respondents are unhappy with the local cost of living (vs. 38% globally).

Within the Urban Work Life Index (27th), Panama City ranks second worldwide in the Work-Life Balance subcategory, only beaten by the German city of Aachen. However, expats in the city worry about their career opportunities (32% negative responses vs. 27% globally) and the state of the local economy (22% vs. 15% globally). The Quality of Urban Living Index (62nd) is the city's worst-rated area. More than one in five expats (21%) are dissatisfied with the leisure options (vs. 12% globally), landing the city among the bottom 10 worldwide for this factor (77th). Close to two in five (39%) also rate local transportation negatively (vs. 19% globally), and an expat from the United States mentions *"heavy traffic"* as an issue there.

40. Santiago de Chile

Ranking 40th in the Expat City Ranking 2019, Santiago performs mediocre in all indices covered by the survey, aside from the Finance & Housing Index (20th). Almost half the expats (47%) find housing in Santiago affordable (vs. 36% globally), and 59% are happy with their financial situation, which is just above the global average (57%). In terms of quality of life (45th), expats are most satisfied with the climate and weather (75% happy vs. 59% globally) but not so much with the quality of the environment (29% negative views vs. 17% globally) and their personal safety: 10% are unhappy with this factor (vs. 9% globally), and just 27% rate it *very good*, compared to 42% of respondents worldwide.

Opinions about the work life (48th) are also mixed: while expats are happy with the state of the local economy (83% vs. 66% globally) and their local career prospects (58% vs. 51% globally), the city ranks 78th worldwide for working hours. In fact, 31% are unhappy with this factor, compared to 19% globally. The Getting Settled Index (63rd) is Santiago's worst area, as, for example, three in ten (30%) do not feel at home (vs. 21% globally), and 23% find the local residents generally unfriendly (vs. 19% globally). A Canadian expat complains about *"attitudes and the language barrier being difficult to overcome"*. In fact, 66% find it difficult to live in Santiago without speaking the local language (vs. 37% globally), and 27% think that people are unfriendly towards foreign residents (vs. 19% globally).

44. Bogotá

Coming in 44th out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019, expats in Bogotá are least satisfied with the quality of life (70th). This is mainly due to negative ratings for local transportation (48% vs. 19% globally) and personal safety (20% vs. 9% globally). A British expat points out the *"lack of personal security"* as one of the city's lowlights. What is more, two in five respondents (40%) are unhappy with the quality of the environment in the Colombian city (vs. 17% globally).

On the other hand, expats praise Bogotá in the Finance & Housing (11th) and Local Cost of Living Indices (15th). More than half (55%) find housing affordable (vs. 36% globally), and 61% rate the local cost of living positively (vs. 43% globally). A Brazilian expat points out Bogotá's *"cost-benefit of living in general"*. Lastly, Bogotá ranks 31st in the Getting Settled Index: expats find it easy to get used to the local culture (75% vs. 62% globally), describe the people as generally friendly towards foreign residents (77% vs. 64% globally), and are happy with their social life (62% vs. 55% globally). However, some knowledge of the local language seems to be essential for expats, as 67% say it is hard to live in Bogotá without speaking Spanish (vs. 37% globally).

56. Buenos Aires

Despite ranking on a low 56th place in the Expat City Ranking 2019 overall, Buenos Aires makes it into the top 10 for one factor surveyed: three in five respondents (60%) find it easy to make friends in the city (vs. 45% globally), ranking Buenos Aires ninth worldwide. With 76% of expats also describing the local residents as generally friendly (vs. 64% globally), Buenos Aires ranks 19th in the Getting Settled Index, its best result across all indices. An expat from Venezuela points out *"the warmth of the people we have met,"* while another from Brazil highlights the *"the cultural and social activities"*. In fact, more than four in five expats (83%) are happy with the local leisure options (vs. 74% globally). While expats are also satisfied with factors such as the climate and weather (83% happy vs. 59% globally) and the availability of healthcare (81% happy vs. 73% globally), the city still only ranks 46th in the Quality of Urban Living Index. This is mainly due to expats worrying about their personal safety (27% unhappy vs. 9% globally) and the political stability (56% unhappy vs. 17% globally), ranking the city in the bottom 10 of the Safety & Politics subcategory (78th).

Buenos Aires can also be found among the ten worst in the world in the Urban Work Life Index (78th), only better than Kuwait City (79th), Istanbul (80th), Athens (81st), and Rome (82nd). Close to three in ten expats in Buenos Aires (29%) are unsatisfied with their job (vs. 19% globally), but interestingly enough, only 21% are unhappy with the local career opportunities (vs. 27% globally). The city does, however, rank especially low in the Job Security subcategory (81st), only better than Rome. This is primarily because almost four in five expats (79%) are worried about the state of the local economy (vs. 15% globally), and 24% are dissatisfied with their job security (vs. 21% globally). Lastly, in a mediocre Finance & Housing Index (53rd), 37% are unsatisfied about their financial situation (vs. 26% globally), and more than a third (34%) find that their disposable household income is not enough to cover daily costs (vs. 23% globally).

62. São Paulo

Coming in 62nd out of 82 cities worldwide in the Expat City Ranking, São Paulo ranks best in the Getting Settled Index (35th): more than three in four respondents (77%) claim that locals are generally friendly (vs. 64% globally), and more than four in five (82%) think that they are also friendly towards foreigners in particular (vs. 64% globally). Around five in nine expats (56%) also find making new friends easy (vs. 45% globally), ranking the city tenth worldwide for this factor.

On the other hand, São Paulo is voted one of the worst destinations in the world regarding the quality of life (75th). In fact, the climate and weather seem to be the only positive in this regard (72% satisfied vs. 59% globally). A German expat comments to like *"the perfect weather and the friendliness of the people"*. However, expats are dissatisfied with other factors surveyed in the Quality of Urban Living Index, such as the quality of the environment (41% negative responses vs. 17% globally) and their personal safety (46% unhappy vs. 9% globally). São Paulo ranks 80th for the latter, only ahead of Cape Town (81st) and Johannesburg (82nd), and an expat from Argentina points out: *"The city is too big, and some parts are not considered safe."* Just slightly better than the Quality of Urban Living Index, São Paulo ranks 61st in the Urban Work Life Index. Expats are particularly worried about the state of the local economy (35% negative responses vs. 15% globally) and dissatisfied with their work-life balance (32% unhappy vs. 21% globally). However, the city still ranks 27th in the Job & Career subcategory, with 56% rating the local career prospects favorably (vs. 51% globally), and 71% being generally happy with their jobs (vs. 64% globally).

75. Lima

Coming in 75th out of 82 in the Expat City Ranking 2019, Lima is the only Central and South American city in the bottom 10. The city ranks worst in the Quality of Urban Living Index (79th), only ahead of Yangon (80th), Kuwait City (81st), and Lagos, Nigeria (82nd). Almost three in five respondents (57%) are unhappy with local transportation (vs. 19% globally), and close to three in ten (29%) worry about their personal safety (vs. 9% globally). A Belgian expat complains about *"general insecurity, poor public transport, and expensive healthcare"*. In fact, about a fifth of expats (19%) are unhappy with the availability of healthcare (vs. 13% globally), and 40% rate the quality of the environment negatively (vs. 17% globally).

The situation does not look a lot better in the Urban Work Life Index (70th): expats are particularly unhappy with their working hours (30% negative responses vs. 19% globally), the state of the local economy (19% vs. 15% globally), and the local career prospects (34% vs. 27% globally). However, Lima ranks among the top 25 cities worldwide in the Local Cost of Living (18th) and the Finance & Housing Indices (25th). In fact, more than half the respondents (52%) are happy with the cost of living (vs. 43% globally), and 45% find housing affordable (vs. 36% globally). An expat from the USA likes how the

“every day expenses are much more affordable,” though only a below-average 44% state that their disposable household income is more than enough to cover daily costs (vs. 49% globally). Housing at least seems to not only be cheap but also easy to find, as 68% of expats rate this its availability positively (vs. 50% globally).

About the Expat City Ranking 2019

The [Expat City Ranking](#) is based on the annual [Expat Insider survey](#) by InterNations. For the survey, more than 20,000 expatriates representing 178 nationalities and living in 187 countries or territories provided information on various aspects of expat life. In addition to their satisfaction with life in their host country, respondents were also invited to share their opinions on the city they are currently living in.

Participants were asked to rate more than 25 different aspects of urban life abroad on a scale of one to seven. The rating process emphasized the respondents' personal satisfaction with these aspects and considered both emotional topics as well as more factual aspects with equal weight. The respondents' ratings of the individual factors were then bundled in various combinations for a total of 13 subcategories, and their mean values were used to draw up four topical indices: Quality of Urban Living, Getting Settled, Urban Work Life, and Finance & Housing. These were further averaged in order to rank 82 cities worldwide. In 2019, the top 10 cities for expats are Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore, Montréal, Lisbon, Barcelona, Zug, The Hague, and Basel. The survey also includes a Local Cost of Living Index, which does, however, not factor into the overall ranking to avoid overrepresenting financial aspects.

For a city to be featured in the Expat City Ranking 2019, a sample size of at least 50 survey participants per city was required.

About InterNations

With more than 3.5 million members in 420 cities around the world, InterNations (www.internations.org) is the largest global community and information site for people who live and work abroad. InterNations offers global and local networking both online and face-to-face. At around 6,000 official events and activities per month, expatriates have the opportunity to meet other global minds. Online services include country and city guides created by a team of professional writers, guest contributions about life abroad, and discussion forums to help members with topics such as the local job or housing search. InterNations membership is by approval only to ensure we remain a community of trust.

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